

hardihood and daring, though scarcely of nice morality. In this lawless state of society, English seamanship and commerce continued to struggle for the next two centuries, learning by deeds of valour and ferocity, now all long forgotten, those qualities which immortalised the splendid pirates who, in the days of Hawkins and Drake, founded modern England on the sea.¹

Chaucer's Shipman from Devonshire is a good apprentice of this school.

Of nic^e conscience took he no kepe.
 If that he faught and had the higher hand,
 By water he sent hem home to every land.²
 But of his craft to reken well his tides,
 His streme's and his strande's him besides,
 His herherwe", his mone and his lodemana^e.*
 Ther was non swiche, from Hull unto Carthage.
 Hardy he was and wise I undertake:
 With many a tempest hadde his berd be shake.
 He knew wel alle the havens, as they were,
 Fro Gotland, to the Cape de finistere,
 And every creke in Bretagne and in Spaine,

With such sturdy customers to man them, the fleets hastily impressed by the admirals for more regular warfare had won the day at Sluys, and held the Channel and the Bay of Biscay until the Treaty of Bretigny (1340-1360). The system was bad, but as long as it was successful it was endured. When, however, the war was renewed in 1366, our naval supremacy could no longer be maintained against the formidable alliance of the French and Spanish seamen. It was then that the hardships of the system of impressment were fully felt, and that the bitter complaint of the maritime population was heard in the petitions of Parliament. While the incompetent admirals kept every ship in port for months together in their bungling efforts to get together a fleet, the enemy's ships were sweeping the sea, burning the fishing villages and port-towns, and slaughtering the inhabitants of the seaboard. The decay of the marine was indeed obvious and undeniable. 'There used,' said Speaker de la Mare with some exaggeration,

¹ Cunningham, *passim*; *Social England*, ii. 42-7 and 182-94.

² Viz. he drowned them. ³ His harbourage, his moon and his pilotage.